

WWBring

The Conflict in Kampuchea

There has been no meaningful change in the overall strategic military situation in Kampuchea during the past year. Over the past three months, however, the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) has worked hard to replenish and reorganize its forces in Kampuchea, to strengthen and broaden its logistics routes to the Thai border, and to improve troop morale. With little advance warning, the Vietnamese could carry out sharp, hard-hitting thrusts against several vulnerable Khmer resistance camps. Recent Vietnamese reconnaissance probes and limited offensive initiatives along the border have raised tensions, but actual fighting has been light.

Military Balance in Kampuchea

Vietnam has 18-20 divisions (an estimated 180,000 troops) in Kampuchea. Nearly half are near the Thai border. These troops are well armed and equipped with conventional weapons provided primarily by the Soviet Union. They control major population centers, most principal lines of communication, and are effectively protecting key rice-growing areas.

Vietnam could draw on reserves to reinforce its position in Kampuchea if challenged by greater resistance activity. Vietnam will be able to meet the costs of occupation as long as Soviet aid bolsters it against the domestic and international pressures that might otherwise alter its behavior.

Democratic Kampuchea (DK) guerrilla forces (estimated to be at least 35,000 troops) bear the brunt of fighting against the Vietnamese. Small DK units operate in virtually every region of Kampuchea but they do not attempt to hold territory or expel the Vietnamese from major positions.

While the DK are now stronger than at any time over the past three years, they are totally dependent on Chinese financial and military support

and on Thai cooperation. The DK does not have sufficient recruits to expand its forces rapidly, and conservation of manpower is an overriding DK concern.

In general, the DK aim to keep up the military pressure that it has applied over the past three years. They are seeking to wear down the Vietnamese physically and mentally through sustained but low level conflict.

The Khmer People's National Liberation Force (KPNLF) is the largest and most active non-Communist resistance group operating in Kampuchea. The KPNLF forces (estimated at 6-8,000 troops) will not soon achieve military parity with the DK. The majority of the KPNLF's armed forces lack training, combat experience, and leadership. While the nucleus of a good KPNLF guerrilla force (2,000 troops) is developing along the Thai border, growth is hindered by recruitment, financial and supply problems.

The KPNLF does not have the potential to develop into a force strong enough to challenge the Vietnamese in Kampuchea.

Non-Communist resistance forces loyal to Prince Sihanouk number less than 1,000 troops. These troops do not carry out any meaningful military operations and are not a factor in the Kampuchean conflict.

Status of Coalition Talks

There have been numerous attempts to get the various Khmer resistance factions to form a united front to add political pressure on Vietnam. Thus far, all have failed. Political maneuvering currently is focused on Singapore's loose coalition proposal. The non-Communists support the proposal. The DK are expected to reject it because they believe it assigns them a subordinate role in the resistance.

The DK, nonetheless, believe some form of united front is essential to defeat the Vietnamese, and are expected to make a counterproposal during the next few weeks.

~~SECRET~~

The prospects for an effective coalition of the divided and antagonistic Khmer resistance groups are not good. Negotiations are likely to be prolonged. Even if some form of association among them is eventually established, the groups will--for all practical purposes--continue to operate as separate entities.

Soviet and Chinese Goals in Indochina

In attempting to expand its influence in Southeast Asia, Moscow's principal concerns are to contain China and diminish US influence, for the present complementing Vietnam's national interests in the region. For their sizable economic investment in support of Vietnamese policy in Indochina, the Soviets have already realized substantial returns that further their regional interests. They have a highly visible advisory presence throughout Indochina, and have gained access to Vietnamese air and naval facilities which enhance their military capabilities in Southeast Asia. These facilities enable the Soviets to better support Indian Ocean deployments and to expand intelligence collection capabilities in the region. Moscow will seek greater influence in Southeast Asia over the longer term by using Vietnam and the neighboring Indochina states to strengthen its presence in the region.

China's principal goal in Kampuchea is to prevent the expansion of Vietnamese and Soviet influence throughout Indochina. Beijing probably perceives little alternative to a relationship with Hanoi marked by long-term hostility and has sought few alternatives to a policy aimed at keeping pressure on Vietnam from as many sides as possible. The Chinese believe such a strategy will eventually force Hanoi to retrench in Kampuchea, loosen its ties to the Soviets, and recognize Chinese security interests in the region. Chinese interests thus are served by protracted warfare in Kampuchea--it weakens Vietnam, creates opportunities to strengthen Chinese influence in Thailand, and gives

~~SECRET~~

Beijing the opportunity to visibly demonstrate its support for ASEAN policies.

China will support a coalition that it sees as adding pressure on the Vietnamese without weakening DK military capabilities.